

## Durham Research Online

---

### Deposited in DRO:

04 November 2015

### Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

### Peer-review status of attached file:

Not peer-reviewed

### Citation for published item:

Skeates, Robin (2013) 'Book review. Nils Anfinset and Melanie Wigglesworth (eds) : 'Local societies in Bronze Age Northern Europe'.', Norwegian archaeological review., 46 (1). pp. 131-133.

### Further information on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00293652.2013.779318>

### Publisher's copyright statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor Francis Group in Norwegian Archaeological Review on 07/06/2013, available online at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/00293652.2013.779318>

### Additional information:

---

### Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

Local Societies in Bronze Age Northern Europe. Edited by Nils Anfinset and Malanie Wrigglesworth. 2012. Sheffield & Bristol, CT: Equinox Publishing Ltd. 260 pp. ISBN 978-1-84553-742-5.

This book stems from a conference held in Bergen in 2008 on 'Regions on the Periphery of the Bronze Age of Northern Europe'. This genesis inevitably gives the volume a mixture of contrasting, even conflicting, kinds of paper and perspective. Interestingly, the term 'periphery' (with its connotations of core-periphery models and World Systems Theory) was dropped for the book, in favour of 'local societies'. However, since some of the authors also seem uncomfortable with the term 'local', the currently prevalent term 'networks' might, in retrospect, have been the one to choose.

The contributors to the book come from across Scandinavia, even if the Bergen-based editors have allowed Norwegian scholars to dominate. Refreshingly, none of the authors are from institutions in the UK or USA, although all the chapters are written in clear English – reflecting excellent proof-reading. A very good spread of scholars at different stages in their careers is represented: from professors to post-doctoral researchers. Kristian Kristiansen, whose impact on our understanding of the European Bronze Age is celebrated this year at the Prehistoric Society's Europa Conference, is conspicuous by his absence as a contributor, although his ideas are critically evaluated in many of the chapters. I also sensed an under-representation of cutting-edge archaeological science studies in this volume: notably in Damm, Eriksson and Melheim's discussions of Bronze Age ceramics and early metallurgy – which would have benefitted from characterization studies, and Prescott's explanation of the impact of the Bell Beaker culture in south-west Norway in terms of a limited human

migration into this region from North Jutland – which would have been benefitted from human isotope studies.

The book is composed of an introduction then thirteen chapters divided into two overlapping parts. To my mind, the chapters in the first part are generally stronger, or at least more innovative, than those in the second part, some of which maintain faith in culture-historical mapping of artefact types (Yushkova) and immigrant warriors or traders (Lavento), and in processual modelling of influences and traditions in ceramic style (Eriksson) and cores and peripheries (Anfinset).

For a book characterized by regional syntheses of large data-sets, it was a welcome surprise to discover also a thoughtful collection of chapters with an emphasis throughout on interpretative model-building. In particular, the book provides a more sophisticated picture of the biographies of early metals over space and time, with an emphasis on local peoples' production, uses and perceptions of them. It is, perhaps, too early to say this book represents a significant turning-point in the archaeology of the Bronze Age in Scandinavia, but it just could be.

Anfinset and Wrigglesworth's 'Introduction' provides a clearly-expressed guide to the chapters in the volume, usefully comparing and contrasting the interpretative approaches and models employed in them, and reiterating a common theme of 'the local in context'. Many theoretically-fashionable keywords and concepts are thrown into the mix: globalization, cultural filter, resistance, hybridization, transmission of knowledge, practice, identities, networks, etc. But this results in a homogenized interpretative commentary that is inevitably less subtle and complex than the prehistoric 'processes of cultural interaction' it seeks to

delineate. Furthermore, the Introduction does not go much beyond the chapters, to contextualize the book in relation to either the history of scholarship on the Bronze Age in Scandinavia or contemporary archaeological theory, with the exception of globalization theory. For example, there is no mention of the influential typo-chronological and diffusionist thinking of the Swedish archaeologist Oscar Montelius (1843–1921), the nature and quality of the existing archaeological data are not questioned, keywords such as ‘local (society)’ and ‘network’ are not defined, and globalization theory is not critically evaluated. Introductions can’t cover everything, and some of the following chapters do go on to address these issues (Forsberg, for example, acknowledges that the term ‘local society’ has been insufficiently defined and theorized), but the addition of a concluding commentary chapter at the end of the volume might have been useful.

Many thought-provoking interpretations and hypotheses are presented in the book, even though, inevitably, these tend to highlight existing gaps in the archaeological record. This tension is evident, for example, in Charlotte Damm’s writing on ‘entangled collective identities’. This will – in my opinion – become the most influential chapter in the volume. Essentially, Damm sets out the basis for a new approach to explaining more nuanced networks and identities in past societies. She provides a good explanation of, and emphasis on, personal and collective identities as potentially complex, multiple and situated. This argument is applied to northern hunter-gatherer communities in the Early Metal Age – a key time of settlement and subsistence change. However, the resultant model of networking is essentially a theoretical one, and although ceramic technology is referred to, the model as it currently stands is insufficiently grounded in archaeological data – and is consequently peppered with undermining words like ‘assuming’, ‘may’, ‘probably’, ‘seem’ and ‘possible’. A similar tension is evident in Lene Melheim’s very good chapter, which emphasizes the

regional complexity and diversity of the origins and development of metallurgy, and argues in favour of the local procurement and production of metals in Scandinavia – an argument that undermines the following, more traditional, chapter by Ørjan Engedal which maintains that early metals were imported into Scandinavia from a source in the eastern Alps. In particular, Melheim hypothesizes that copper mining evolved locally out of mining for greenstone axes and that hunter-gatherer groups engaged in copper mining in inland south-east Norway. Unfortunately, this interesting model remains a hypothetical one, due to the current lack of discovery of well-defined prehistoric copper mines in the region.

A tension is also evident in the book between a widely-held wish to construct general interpretative models at the same time as a desire to account for local archaeological variability. For example, Kristin Armstrong Oma usefully challenges the traditional archaeological separation of the large-scale and the local, and also Kristiansen and Larsson's grand narrative of the European Bronze Age with its emphasis on large-scale cosmologies, by arguing that animals – by living closely with people in daily life – gained their significance in large-scale cosmologies, which recursively informed household practices. This sound starting point is developed into a generalized metaphorical model of the layout of activities in a Scandinavian 'type 2' house, but might have been better developed in terms of diverse local case-studies. Mette Roesgaard Hansen's chapter on 'Expressing identity through ritual in the Early Bronze Age' is likewise interesting and problematic. Focussing on the relative positioning of objects and bodies in Early Bronze Age cist burials in the Thy region in North-West Denmark, Roesgaard Hansen finds that male burials were more standardized than female burials, and so argues that male identities were more group-oriented and created within wider networks, while female identities were more varied and individual, being created within smaller, local, domestic networks. However, the approach is somewhat

contradictory – wishing to generalize about burial practices (including defining ‘the ritual norm’ for males and females) at the same time as trying to say something about multiple individual identities. By comparison, Sophie Bergerbrandt’s approach to gendered identities is more convincing. It compares male and female burials, and especially grave goods, in the south Scandinavian Bronze Age and in the North German Lüneburg culture, in order to compare differences and changes in masculine and feminine ideals in the two areas.

Striking a successful balance between archaeological theory and data is far from simple, but two chapters stand out as exemplary. Lars Forsberg’s thoughtful chapter on ‘coastal and inland societies in the Bothnian area during the Epineolithic and Early Metal Age’ complements Damm’s theoretical perspective, while using a ‘bottom-up’ approach to place greater emphasis on patterns in the archaeological evidence. Inspired by ‘exploratory data analysis’ in statistics, Forsberg contrasts ‘smooth’ general trends (larger structures and structural relations working between local groups of people) with ‘rough’ anomalies (dynamic local societies) disturbing the general, and he emphasizes the latter. In so doing, Forsberg critiques the traditional, generalizing, division between coastal Nordic Bronze Age agro-pastoralists and northern hunter-gatherer groups. Instead, and with reference to a deep and extensive knowledge of patterns in the archaeological data, he emphasizes a mosaic of less tightly-bounded local groups exhibiting a diversity of short- and long-range contacts, economies and material cultures. Forsberg suggests that the concept of ‘network’ is particularly useful for explaining this, with its emphasis on the mobility of people in the past and their social and material connections along naturally and culturally constrained ‘pipelines’. Equally fascinating is Peter Skoglund’s chapter, which argues that Scania and Bohuslän were borderlands – areas between different cultures or social groups – that acted as contact zones where people from the Baltic, the Danish archipelago and the North Sea met

and exchanged goods and ideas. This, Skoglund argues, led to an emphasis on ships in the rock art of North Bohuslän and to the use of some unique ship symbolism in the area.

Overall, and despite its inherent tensions, this book provides an excellent introduction to the breadth of current archaeological studies and interpretations of the Bronze Age in Scandinavia – one which exemplifies how vibrant Nordic archaeology is today.

**Robin Skeates**

Department of Archaeology, Durham University, South Road, Durham. DH1 3LE. UK.

Robin.Skeates@durham.ac.uk